

W. W. Kimball House
1801 South Prairie Avenue
Chicago
Cook County
Illinois

HABS No. ILL-1077

HABS
ILL,
16-CHIG,
75-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN ARCHITECTURAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

W. W. KIMBALL HOUSE

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ILL,
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Location: 1801 South Prairie Avenue, Chicago, Cook County,
Illinois.

Present Owner
and Occupant: Medalist Publications Inc.

Present Use: Offices for a publishing company.

Statement of
Significance: One of the few remaining residences along Chicago's
earliest Gold Coast area, it was designed by
Solon S. Beman for the founder of the Kimball
Piano Company.

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This house is of interest as one of the few mansions of Chicago's first Gold Coast which have survived. Chicago architect Solon S. Beman designed an urbanized French chateau in Francis I style.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The house is an irregular rectangle with the connected carriage house completing the form to make it an "L." There are two-and-one-half stories above a raised basement.
2. Wall construction, finish and color: Light grey Bedford stone ashlar was used for the house. The carriage house has plastered walls of the same color as the house walls.
3. Structural system, framing: Wooden floor system and roof construction.
4. Porch: There is an entrance porch and stairs with limestone paving and a pulpit-like circular balcony to the north.
5. Chimneys: Same as walls.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance has a pair of oak doors, each leaf with a small panel below and a large glass light above the panel. The carriage house doors are wood, paneled and painted black.
- b. Windows: The wood sash is painted black. The principal windows have one large pane with a single pane transom above. The transom bar is stone. Some of the small windows and the large central hall windows by the main stairway contain clear glass set in a pattern of lead comes.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape: The roof forms are those associated with French chateaux -- sloping steeply up from level eaves.
- b. Covering: Black slate and copper ridge coverings are used with spikey ornament.
- c. Eaves: Level, with built-in copper gutters.
- d. Dormers and towers: Both are used, topped off in copper. The dormer gable wall rises above the dormer roof. The tower roofs are conical.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: The most important feature of the floor plan is the large central hall, stretching across the house from the north to the south sides. The main entrance leads into the north part of the hall's west wall and the staircase rises along the north wall of the hall to the second floor. Both ends of the hall contain fireplaces, with the southern one centered in a bay window. Opposite the southern portion of the hall's west wall is a parlor. This is at the front of the house. On the east side of the hall, and opposite the parlor, is the dining room. A small den is on the east side of the hall opposite the entrance vestibule. Kitchen and service rooms extend to the rear of the house, connecting with the dining room through a service hallway which contains the service stairs. The carriage house adjoins the house, making an I to the south.

- b. Second floor: The main stairway from the large central hall rises in a two story portion of this room. The second floor hallway is unusually wide and penetrates the second floor from the front to the back of the house; that is, at right angles to the first floor hall. The three main bedrooms are placed one at the front--with a small, square room next to it in front--and two at the south side. There is a servant's room at the rear, and there are rooms above the carriage house.
 - c. Third floor: This floor contains five bedrooms and a common room.
 - d. Attic: This covers a part of the house and is lighted by skylights.
 - e. Cellar: The cellar is finished and divided into several rooms.
2. Stairways: The main stairway from the first to the second floor is a feature of the house. It is constructed of oak and rises partly along the north wall of the large main hall. Tuscan columns in oak stand at the second floor balustrade overlooking the stair well. There is a balcony that once contained an organ. The other stairways are utilitarian--steel from second floor to attic at the front of the house, wood at the rear service stair.
3. Flooring: The house presently is floored in the principal rooms with resilient flooring or carpet. One can hear the wooden floors below, but they cannot be seen. The rear portion of the cellar is floored in red tile, 3" x 6", unglazed; and the front portion in resilient flooring. The entrance vestibule has a tessera floor.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The central hall has simple oak paneled walls and oak beams at the plaster ceiling. The oak is a natural golden color detailed in a reserved Queen Anne Revival fashion. The hall is very similar to that in the Glessner House across the street. The front parlor has bookcases, wainscot, and mantel creating a continuous line around the room at a height of about 4'-6". The detailing is in a reserved Queen Anne Revival vein. The walls are plastered with dentils and moldings at the juncture of ceilings and walls. The dining room carries through the elaborateness of the exterior Francis I theme. The den is paneled in dark-stained, plain walnut with a plaster ceiling. The bedrooms have plaster walls and ceilings. The cellar has tongue and

groove wainscot in the rear portion and oak at the front. Ceilings and upper walls are plastered here.

5. Doorways and doors: The doors match the wainscot in general, and are five paneled.
6. Decorative features and trim: In general the decoration is of Queen Anne Revival style, and this fact negates the effect of the Francis I exterior. As one crosses the threshold one is whisked through two hundred years of architectural history and transported from Bretagne to Great Britain. In this respect, a bit of Victorian eclectic inconsistency has lingered on. Fireplaces utilize facings of marble or tile (second floor).
7. Notable hardware: Interior doors have brass knobs of rather pointed oval form.
8. Lighting, type of fixtures: Lighting is now electric, and ceiling mounted fluorescent fixtures have been installed in many rooms for office efficiency.
9. Heating: Now central.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. General setting and orientation: The Kimball House faces South Prairie Avenue at the southeast corner of East 18th Street. The carriage house is at the rear, connecting to the south side of the house. H. H. Richardson's Glessner House is directly across the street. South of the Kimball house, one other stone house still stands. The group are a remnant from the era when the immediate neighborhood was the home of many of the wealthiest of Chicago's citizens. A block to the east lie railroad tracks, and to the north are industrial buildings. This general portion of Chicago is a center for the publishing trades now, interspersed with vacant land and the tenements of the poor. Two miles to the north is the central area of the city, the Loop.
2. Outbuildings: None. The carriage house is connected.
3. Landscaping, walks, enclosures: Portions of the side-walks on the north side of the house are limestone blocks about four feet square. An iron fence six feet high surrounds the house, dipping down where the pulpit-like balcony of the front porch projects beyond it. There is a gateway at the front entrance. There is no landscaping. The south yard beside the house is paved

for automobile parking and surrounded by chain-link fencing, necessary for security in this portion of Chicago.

Prepared by Wesley Shank
Supervisory Architect
National Park Service
August 24, 1967

PROJECT INFORMATION

The records of this structure were made during the 1967 Chicago IV Project. This was the fourth in a series of summer projects designed to record the significant architecture of the Chicago area. The project was sponsored by the late Mr. Earl J. Reed, FAIA. He was assisted by John R. Fugard, FAIA, Treasurer, and Miss Agnes E. Hodges of the Chicago Chapter Foundation, and a Selection Committee consisting of James Arkin, AIA; Ruth Schoneman, Art Institute of Chicago; and J. Carson Webster, Northwestern University. Organizations cooperating with HABS in this project were: The Chicago Chapter of the American Institute of Architects; the Chicago Chapter Foundation; the Chicago Community Trust; the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies; the Illinois Arts Council; and the Chicago Heritage Committee. The Council also made funds available for a Statewide Inventory Project with out-of-Chicago architects cooperating. Quarters were provided at Glessner House through the Chicago School of Architecture Foundation.

Mr. James C. Massey, Chief, Historic American Buildings Survey, was in over-all charge of HABS summer programs. The Project Supervisor was Wesley Shank, Iowa State University. Other members of the summer team were: Historian, Leland Roth, University of Illinois, Urbana; Photographer, Philip Turner; Secretary, Mrs. Burt Schloss; and Student Assistant Architects: Keleal Nassin, Tulane University; Maurice Griffin, Illinois Institute of Technology; Allan Steenhusen and David Vyerberg, Iowa State University.